

# Wisconsin Cooperative Conservation Initiative

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## ***Background***

The Wisconsin Cooperative Conservation Initiative (WCCI) is a multi-agency partnership established in 2004 to multiply the benefits of federal and state conservation programs by encouraging agencies to focus resources on high priority watersheds.

## ***Partners***

The partnership consists of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, USDA Forest Service (FS), University of Wisconsin-Extension, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

## ***Purpose and Outcomes***

Three principal outcomes are realized from this initiative:

- Strengthened relationships and cooperative efforts among federal, state, and local agencies, conservation nonprofits, and agricultural industry groups by:
  - Identifying common goals
  - Increasing information and expertise sharing between partners
  - Utilizing the cooperating partner's collective work to help members achieve their individual agency objectives
  - Engaging new partners and stakeholders
- Improved delivery of on-the-ground conservation by:
  - Identifying high priority lands, watersheds, and activities
  - Sharing resources, programs and organizational capacities
  - Implementing complementary conservation programs, both as individual organizations and as a collective group
- Demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative efforts on program implementation, environmental benefits, social, and economic impacts through monitoring and evaluation:
  - Physical impacts and changes in the watershed
  - Effectiveness of the collaboration in helping participants achieve their individual agency goals and objectives

## ***Accomplishments***

**Targeted Outreach and Education:** Attracting owners of lands with significant natural resource value to federal and state conservation programs is high priority for WCCI. In the past two years, partners have collaborated in two CSP watersheds to identify high priority lands, and educate and inform landowners about the CSP. Joint funding is currently being used for a position at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge to work with local individuals and organizations at improving water quality in Horicon Marsh, a wetland of international importance.

**EQIP Special Initiative:** The WCCI selected the Upper Rock as a priority watershed in December 2005. Wisconsin NRCS, with support from the partnership, applied for a special EQIP initiative, and secured an additional \$500,000 in FY06 EQIP funds to provide cost sharing and technical assistance to farmers in this watershed for manure storage, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, and associated conservation practices.

**Reed Canary Grass Working Group:** Reed Canary Grass is a particularly problematic invasive species that was identified by NRCS as a barrier to achieving the full benefits of a CSP contract. Because reed canary grass is also detrimental to wildlife, a subgroup of WCCI is working to develop a systematic key to control reed canary grass for landowner use. The committee plans to seek funds to implement an on-the-ground applied research study, preferably using lands enrolled in CSP as study sites.

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